

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A gaming system comprising:

- (a) a plurality of distributed terminals for dispensing tickets,
- (b) at least one central computer in communication with said terminals,
- (c) each of said tickets bearing a machine-readable ticket code unique to that ticket in said system,
- (d) each of said terminals having at least one code reader for reading said ticket code from each of said tickets,
- (e) data storage means for storing a prize code, and
- (f) comparison means for comparing said prize code with said ticket code read from each of said tickets, and for indicating a match between said given ticket code and said prize code.

2. A system as in Claim 1 in which said data storage means for storing said prize code includes storage means at each of said terminals, and intermittently-operating modem means interconnecting each of said terminals and said central computer for uploading and downloading information between said terminals and said central computer.

3. A system as in Claim 1 in which each of said terminals is connected on-line to said central computer and includes means for transmitting said ticket code to said central computer, said

data storage means prize and said comparing means being contained in said central computer.

4. A system as in Claim 1 in which each of said tickets bears indicia covered with a removable covering to be removed to play a lottery game, one indicating that it is a jackpot winner.

5. A system as in Claim 1 in which each of said terminals includes display means and communication means for communicating ticket sales information to said central computer, and said central computer being programmed to add a pre-determined increment to the amount of a jackpot prize until a match indication is given by said comparing means, said communication means being adapted for communicating said amount of said jackpot prize to said display means.

6. A system as in Claim 5 in which said comparing means is connected to deliver a match-indicating signal to said central computer to stop the adding of increments to said jackpot prize amount, said central computer being programmed to reduce said jackpot prize to a predetermined lower amount upon delivery of said match-indicating signal.

7. A system as in Claim 5 in which said central computer is programmed to add a second pre-determined increment to a second monetary pool in response to said ticket sales information, and for using the amount in said pool as the amount of said jackpot prize when said match occurs.

8. A system as in Claim 4 in which each of said terminals includes a printer for printing play information including indicia to be matched with said indicia on one of said tickets to determine the amount of any winnings to the holder of said ticket.

9. A system as in Claim 8 in which said printer is selected from the group consisting of one which is adapted to print said play information on the ticket being dispensed, and one which is adapted to print said play information on a separate sheet.

10. A gaming system comprising a plurality of independent sub-systems, each of said sub-systems comprising:

- (a) a plurality of distributed terminals for dispensing tickets,
- (b) at least one central computer in communication with said terminals,
- (c) each of said tickets bearing a machine-readable ticket code unique to that ticket in said gaming system,
- (d) each of said terminals having at least one code reader for reading said ticket code from each of said tickets,
- (e) data storage means for storing a prize code,
- (f) comparison means for comparing said prize code with said ticket code read from each of said tickets, and for

indicating a match between said given ticket code and said prize code,

(g) said gaming system including supervisory computer means connected for communication with a central computer of each of said independent sub-systems,

(h) said supervisory computer means being programmed to receive ticket sales data from each of said sub-systems, determine the amount of a jackpot prize as a function of said ticket sales data, and communicate information to each of said sub-systems as to the amount of said jackpot prize and the occurrence of a match between a prize code and a ticket code.

11. A system as in Claim 10 in which each of said sub-systems is located in a different state.

12. A gaming method comprising the steps of:

(a) storing a plurality of gaming tickets in each of a plurality of gaming ticket dispensers, each of said tickets bearing machine-readable coded information uniquely identifying it;

(b) providing a code reader associated with each of said dispensers for reading said coded information from each ticket dispensed from each dispenser;

(c) detecting said information indicating that a given ticket is a winner; and

(d) upon dispensing said ticket informing the recipient of said ticket that it is a winner.

13. A method as in Claim 12 including the step of:

(a) accumulating a prize pool by detecting each ticket dispensed from said dispensers and adding a corresponding amount to said prize pool;

(b) stopping said accumulation upon the detection of the dispensing of said winner; and

(c) starting to accumulate another prize pool upon the detection of the dispensing of an additional ticket after the detection of said winner.

14. A method as in Claim 13 including starting said other prize pool with an amount greater than zero.

15. A method as in Claim 13 including:

(a) accumulating a second prize pool by adding an amount of money per ticket significantly less than the first-named prize pool; and

(b) using said second prize pool to start said other prize pool after the detection of said winner.

16. A method as in Claim 12 including the steps of:

(a) accumulating a second prize pool by adding an amount of money per ticket significantly less than the first-named prize pool; and

(b) using said second prize pool to start said other prize pool after the detection of said winner.

16. A method as in Claim 12 including the steps of:

(a) storing said identification information and the winner-indicating information in information storage means; and

(b) using said second prize pools to start said other prize pool after the detection of said winner.

17. A method as in Claim 12 including providing human-readable information regarding winning another game, said human-readable information being covered by a manually-removable covering, said machine-readable information including the amount of any winners to which the ticket holder is entitled in said other game.

18. A gaming method comprising the steps of:

(a) providing a plurality of ticket dispensing machines;

(b) using said machines to dispense instant-winner lottery tickets each having information identifying one of a plurality of specific games in which the ticket is issued, and having a removable cover over human-readable gaming information, each of said tickets also bearing machine-readable unique identification information;

(c) providing a jackpot prize pool which tickets from a plurality of said specific game are eligible to win;

(d) providing a code reader in each of said dispensing means for reading said machine-readable identification information and producing corresponding signals; and

(e) detecting said signals to identify a winner of said jackpot prize.

19. A method as in Claim 18 in which the step of providing said jackpot prize comprises using said code readers to detect the dispensing of each ticket from said dispensing machines and adding to said jackpot prize pool a predetermined amount, stopping the adding to said prize pool when said winner has been detected, and starting a new prize pool at an amount lower than that in said jackpot prize pool.

20. A method as in Claim 19 including the step of accumulating a shadow pool by adding a second predetermined amount, smaller than the first-named amount, for each ticket dispensed by said dispensing machines, and using the amount in said shadow pool to start the new prize pool when a winner has been detected.

21. A method as in Claim 18 including the step of informing the recipient of a winning ticket that the ticket is a winner upon the dispensing of the ticket.